Baroque Portraiture in Silesia (Wrocław, 26-27 Nov 26)

Wrocław, The Ossoliński National Institute, Nov 26–27, 2026
Deadline: Jul 31, 2026

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Baroque Portraiture in Silesia and its Neighbouring Lands: New Perspectives.

Following the end of the Thirty Years' War and the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Silesia, as a land belonging to the Bohemian Crown, became the arena of fundamental political and social transformations. In place of the local Protestant nobility, new cosmopolitan aristocratic families of the Catholic faith emerged, loyal to the imperial authority. The confessional character of the Habsburg state fostered the renewal of religious life and increased the influence of ecclesiastical institutions on politics, culture, and society. These changes manifested themselves in numerous and magnificent artistic foundations. Noble and episcopal palaces, monasteries, and academies filled with art, with portraiture occupying a particularly prominent place. Alongside images of the ruler and his family – expressions of political loyalty – noble portrait galleries comprised likenesses of contemporary family members and their most illustrious ancestors. Thus created, the ancestor halls were intended as an artistic manifestation of high status, aspirations, and proof of noble lineage. Bishops' palaces were adorned with portraits of successive church hierarchs, while the representative halls of monasteries were filled with extensive portrait cycles depicting subsequent abbots and abbesses. These often included imaginative representations of semi-legendary early superiors, reaching many centuries back, thereby underscoring institutional continuity and sanctioning the communities' exceptional social position.

On the other hand, despite a more difficult political and religious situation, numerous portrait commissions also came from the numerically dominant Protestant inhabitants of Silesia: wealthy burghers, councillors, scholars, humanists, and Lutheran clergy, equally eager to emphasise their significance as prosperous and educated representatives of society. It must of course be remembered that the portrait in this period served various functions: from the most fundamental one of „making the absent present," through representative, ritual, propagandistic, and commemorative roles, to finally serving as a tool of self-creation and manifestation of identity (social, political, and religious).

Thanks to extensive field research conducted in recent years, we know of over 800 surviving Baroque portraits of various types located in Silesian museums, palaces, monasteries, and public institutions. Despite such a rich heritage, many aspects of this artistic activity still await new, interdisciplinary approaches. Suffice it to say that over forty years have passed since the last exhibition on early modern portraiture in Silesia, organized by the National Museum in Wrocław, and since then no comprehensive, overarching study has been dedicated to this subject, leaving it on

the margins of other art-historical inquiries.

Therefore, the Institute of Art History of the University of Wrocław and the Ossoliński National Institute invite you to participate in an international academic conference devoted to early modern portraiture in Silesia and its neighbouring lands. The artistic phenomena observable in Silesia were similar in other lands of the Bohemian Crown, while the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had extraordinary patrons of portraiture among its magnates and high-ranking clergy. We invite you to jointly reflect on the place of the portrait in the visual culture of Central Europe, on its functions, meanings, and transformations over the centuries. We are open to new methodological perspectives and various interdisciplinary approaches that take into account the socio-economic conditions of the epoch and region. We welcome not only scholars interested in painted portraiture but also in sculptural, graphic, and drawn portraits.

PROPOSED THEMATIC AREAS

We encourage the submission of papers addressing, among others, the following topics:

- The portrait and its function: representation of power, propaganda, commemoration, self-creation, the portrait as an object of exchange
- Historicising portraiture and sacred identification portraits
- The portrait and the sitter’s identity: confession, estate, nationality, gender
- Portraitists and their place in the art market: the artistic activity of portrait painters and guild structures with their constraints, secular and ecclesiastical servitorate, artist mobility and earnings
- The portrait and its display: residential ancestor galleries, monastic portrait cycles of abbots and abbesses, collections of portraits of famous figures, scholars and professors, bourgeois interiors, images in public spaces, epitaphs and tombstones
- The portrait in sculpture, numismatics, graphic arts, and decorative arts
- The turbulent fate of portraits: translocations, destruction, thefts, restitution

The thematic scope remains flexible. We will gladly consider proposals that extend beyond the aforementioned areas.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Speaking time: 20 minutes
Conference languages: English
Please send your proposals by 31 July 2026 to:
marek.kwasny2@uwr.edu.pl

Submissions should include:

Full name, academic title/degree, affiliation
Paper title
Abstract (max. 200 words)
Short biographical note
Notification of acceptance will be sent by 31 August 2026.
CONFERENCE PUBLICATION

We plan to publish a peer-reviewed post-conference monograph in English with a high-scoring academic publisher.

FEES AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Conference Fee: 450 PLN / 100 EUR
The fee includes: Conference materials, coffee breaks, lunches, and a gala dinner.
Travel and Accommodation: Please note that the organizers do not cover travel or accommodation expenses. However, we are happy to assist with hotel reservations where possible.

Organisers:
Institute of Art History, University of Wrocław
The Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław

Scientific Committee:
doc. Mgr. Katarína Kolbiarz Chmelinová, PhD., Comenius University Bratislava
Prof. dr hab. Andrzej Kozieł, University of Wrocław, University of Ostrava
Mgr. Zuzana Macurová, Ph.D., Palacký University Olomouc
Prof. dr hab. Jacek Tylicki, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Organising Committee:
Dr Emilia Kłoda, The Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław
Dr Marek Kwaśny, Institute of Art History, University of Wrocław

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